

Chapter 4. Community Outreach Approach and Highlights

The purpose of the Central Alameda County CBTP is to confirm gaps in transportation for low-income communities in South Hayward, Cherryland, and Ashland, and identify solutions to meet these gaps. The process of developing solutions relies on community members; community involvement was the most critical elements of this plan. This chapter describes the community outreach approach that was implemented as part of this effort. The results of the outreach effort are summarized in the next chapter, Chapter 5.

The Community Outreach Plan

Transportation is an issue that affects nearly everyone on a day-to-day basis. The place where we live is rarely the same location where we work, go to school, shop, seek community services, or enjoy recreational activities. For people with access to a working automobile or for individuals who live along a transit route that connects the many places they travel, the current transportation system works for them if they can afford it. They need not give too much thought to how they make their day-to-day trips between activities. For people with limited resources (low income, no car or only one car for many family members, etc.), transportation is a factor that not only limits what they can accomplish, but also how they can participate in their own community.

The outreach process was successful because so many people were asked to focus on how transportation affects them, their clients, students, employees, etc. Involving Cherryland residents, South Hayward employees, Ashland social services and a host of other community members and representatives of neighborhoods and agencies, the process empowered the community to think critically about these issues and share their ideas. These ideas provide a solid base from which strategies were developed, evaluated and recommended.

This Community Outreach Plan allowed for different formats for input, as well as outreach to residents of Cherryland-Ashland and South Hayward, political leaders, social service organizations, special interest groups and other agencies and organizations. Hence, this CBTP reflects the values and interests of central Alameda County's residents in the target communities.

Objectives

Six objectives were developed for community involvement as part of the CBTP. To evaluate the effectiveness of the community involvement effort, these objectives were reviewed regularly during the CBTP process and again at the end of the study. The objectives are based on those identified by MTC for the Bay Area Community-Based Transportation Planning Process; items identified by ACCMA in the RFP; and other priorities based on

issues identified by the local community-based organizations that participated in the CBTP process. Each objective is listed below, along with supportive statements for measuring the effectiveness of the CBTP process in addressing the objective. The objectives are as follows:

Objective 1. Integrate a variety of community interests focusing on local residents' priorities, and also including public agencies, transit providers, ACCMA and MTC.

- All key agencies are aware of project and are contacted.
- Participants include representatives from all major agencies and organizations in the community.
- Community needs and alternatives reflect diverse community representative participation, and thus include issues related to transit, pedestrian access, travel needs, automobile access, public information about transportation and a mix of other transportation concerns.

Objective 2. Conduct a community-based prioritization of transportation needs and potential solutions that may include both traditional transit solutions and nontraditional transportation program options.

- No single mode is identified as the "solution" to addressing community concerns and priorities.
- The emphasis in developing a solution is to look at low cost and "out of the box" options

Objective 3. Afford community representatives the opportunity to share points of view on local and regional growth, transportation programs and policies, and very specific community transportation problems.

- Community representatives provide detailed, candid answers.
- Community representatives express interest and participate in follow-up Community Representative Group meetings.
- Community representatives take ownership of process by participating in the community representative group and supporting project recommendations.

Objective 4. Prioritize key issues and build consensus.

- List of issues is made manageable so comprehensible alternatives are developed and presented to the community for evaluation.
- The community agrees on "priorities" for the CBTP recommendations.
- Participants agree upon evaluation criteria.

Objective 5. Educate the community on the complex decisions required to develop solutions within the study area.

- The process not only provides information and solicits feedback, but also clarifies the tradeoffs involved in using resources for one solution versus another.
- Community meetings are forums for educating residents.
- Individuals have an opportunity to share experiences and talk about how changes to the transportation network would improve their own travel.
- In presentations, use a global view about why the community should get involved and care about this project.

Objective 6. Establish partnerships with individuals and CBOs for providing community education, public information and implementation tools for CBTP recommendations.

- Experience of local organizations in the target communities is tapped to address the concerns of the community.
- Persons or organizations are identified and agree to serve as a “champion” of alternatives upon completion of the CBTP.
- Community-based organizations commit to “implementation support” for the alternatives.

To address these objectives, the CBTP followed a three-tiered approach to optimize public participation and community input in the planning process. The approach was as follows:

- **Listen to the community.** Gather useful information by talking with community members and representatives in interviews and at meetings and through surveys. The goal was to get all of the issues “on the table” early in the study process. This way, we were able to gain an understanding of what types of concerns might arise as we moved during the study process.
- **Integrate information.** Work with local organizations to share recommendations as the study progressed. Provide interagency coordination by bringing community representatives together.
- **Share information.** Provide informative, comprehensive information to the public. Showcase the public involvement process in a newsletter, local media, etc.

The result of this approach is a comprehensive public involvement plan. The key elements of this strategy are identified in the following section, the Action Plan for Public Involvement.

Action Plan for Public Participation

Seven strategies were developed and followed throughout the community involvement effort. These strategies are as follows:

- **Strategy 1** - Obtain Input/Comments through Community representative Interviews
- **Strategy 2** - Identify and Attend Scheduled Meetings and Events for Community, Planning, and Social Service Groups
- **Strategy 3** - Conduct Focus Group Sessions for Detailed Review of Issues and Alternatives with Consumers
- **Strategy 4** - Distribute and collect Survey/Feedback Forms
- **Strategy 5** - Facilitate Community Representative Group
- **Strategy 6** - Conduct Public Open House Meetings
- **Strategy 7** - Provide Ongoing Public Information

Figure 4-1 illustrates how these strategies work together to comprise a comprehensive community involvement effort by addressing the study's community outreach objectives.

Figure 4-1 Outreach Objectives and Strategies

	Strategy 1 Community Interviews	Strategy 2 Scheduled Community Meetings	Strategy 3 Focus Groups	Strategy 4 Survey/ Feedback Forms	Strategy 5 Community Represent. Group	Strategy 6 Open House Meetings	Strategy 7 Ongoing Public Information
Objective 1. Integrate a variety of community interests focusing on local residents' priorities, and also including public agencies, transit providers, ACCMA and MTC.	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Objective 2. Conduct a community-based prioritization of transportation needs and potential solutions that may include both traditional transit solutions and nontraditional transportation program options.			X		X	X	
Objective 3. Afford community decision-makers the opportunity to share points of view on local and regional growth, transportation programs and policies, and very specific community transportation problems.	X				X		
Objective 4. Prioritize key issues and build consensus.		X	X	X	X	X	
Objective 5. Educate the community on the complex decisions required to develop solutions within the study area.	X	X	X		X	X	X
Objective 6. Establish partnerships with individuals and CBOs for providing community education, public information and implementation tools for CBTP recommendations.	X	X			X		X

The figure highlights the value of all of the strategies in combination. The following sections describe these strategies.

Strategy 1. Obtain Input/Comments through Community Representative Interviews

Ultimately, to better inform the public and solicit useful feedback as part of the planning process, it is necessary to obtain input from *individuals within the community* (as opposed to just their representatives). However, to initiate the community outreach process, we conducted interviews and focus groups with transportation operators and community representatives. Community representatives were identified by staff at ACCMA as well as by members of the consulting team. The list of community representatives includes local organizations, social service agencies, schools, job training programs, transportation providers, childcare centers, business leaders, transit agency representatives, city and county representatives, and others with a stake in the outcome of this effort. The list of

organizations, community groups and agencies that participated in the interview process is included in **Appendix A**.

Community Representative Interview Questionnaire

An Interview Guide was developed, with input from ACCMA, in order to ensure that the time in meetings was spent most productively. The purpose of the interviews was to understand the community representatives' perceptions of community transportation needs, specific transportation concerns, ideas for solutions, their role in the implementation effort, and potential challenges to implementing recommendations. Community representatives were asked to identify persons and organizations that should be included in the CBTP effort to add to our contacts. Although a limited number of interviews were conducted by telephone, most were in face-to-face meetings. A copy of the Community Representative Interview Guide is included in **Appendix B**.

Strategy 2. Identify Scheduled Meetings and Events for Key Community, Planning, and Social Service Groups

To educate the community about the CBTP and solicit participation from community members, we "piggybacked" on many of the meetings and events already held in the community. The consulting team prepared a calendar of meetings, which afforded the scheduling of presentations to update community members about the CBTP. We updated this calendar periodically throughout the course of the study.

Community meetings were an opportunity to speak with multiple interested parties and facilitate a dialogue on the issue of transportation. Typically they were sessions with large groups of residents and agency or community representatives to discuss transportation concerns and ideas for solutions. In some cases these meetings were with local residents, seniors, or homeless families; in other cases they were with groups of social service coordinators, health care providers, youth or community leaders. When there was enough time allotted to the study team, the consultant explained the project and promoted a dialogue among participants similar to a focus group on how people travel, where they need to go, problems with transit and strategies that might address area transportation problems.

Presentations were made at over 16 Community Meetings (seven in South Hayward, five in Ashland, and four in Cherryland). Meetings were attended by the consulting team.¹ For each presentation, a speaker's agenda and handouts were provided. For Spanish-speaking groups, a Spanish-speaking representative was available. In all meetings, notes were recorded and summarized. Survey forms were distributed for meeting attendees to take and fill out, and team members collected them and summarized responses. These notes and comments played a critical role in the definition of problems and solutions. A sample presentation format is included in **Appendix C**.

¹ Staff from Nelson\Nygaard and the CBO representing the study area. A few small meetings were attended by either a Nelson\Nygaard or CBO representative.

Strategy 3. Focus Group Sessions for Detailed Review of Issues and Alternatives with Consumers

Focus groups with transit users and potential users (local residents) were conducted in each of the study areas. The purpose of these meetings was for transit users to come together to discuss issues of importance to them that they might otherwise not have an opportunity to talk about. The focus groups provided an opportunity for the “average consumer” to talk openly as part of a group, expressing detailed concerns about specific problems with public transit and access to transportation. Focus group participants were clients of social service organizations.

Each focus group was facilitated by at least two members of the CBTP team using a focus group facilitation guide (See **Appendix D**).

Consulting team members scheduled, recruited for, and facilitated the focus groups. Outcomes of the focus groups and interviews are presented in Chapter 5.

Strategy 4. Survey/Feedback Forms

Having a direct conversation with community members about their transportation concerns is ideal but not always possible. At some of the community meetings and special events, not enough time was available for significant discussion. At those meetings and events, an overview of the project was given and surveys were distributed.

Surveys provide a “snap-shot” of resident needs and perceptions, particularly residents who may be difficult to reach in other ways. These include residents who are unable to attend community meetings or events. The survey information provides useful input to inform the decision-making process.

Project team members distributed surveys in a variety of ways:

- Attending community events to discuss transportation issues with residents and to distribute surveys.
- Gathering input at community meetings with limited time on the agenda.
- Having community centers distribute, mail and collect surveys from their attendees.

Survey forms were available in English and Spanish. The forms provided an opportunity for the community to submit written feedback for consideration in the enumeration of community problems/concerns and the development of transportation alternatives. The one-page survey form included questions about AC Transit services, access to transportation services (BART, bus, automobile, bicycle and pedestrian), locations where transportation services are limited, and potential solutions.

Although a broad range of community members was surveyed, the total number of surveys (200) is not large enough to be statistically valid. Many more surveys were distributed and collected in Cherryland — where there were few opportunities to conduct in-depth

discussions with community members at community meetings — than in Ashland, where many more face-to-face community meetings were conducted. Likewise, in South Hayward, where community meetings were a very successful mechanism for soliciting public input, few surveys were distributed and collected. Nevertheless, the survey provides a significant amount of supportive information about transportation needs from a cross-section of the community, particularly from people who are unable to attend scheduled meetings and open houses. A sample of the survey feedback form for South Hayward is included in **Appendix E**.

Strategy 5. Community Representative Group

The purpose of the Community Representative Group was to gather input and obtain support from participants before conducting the evaluation process for the proposed community-based solutions. During the community representative interviews, we asked people whether they would be interested in convening again as part of the community representative group (see **Appendix B**, Question 8) to review issues, service alternatives and recommendations. These individuals comprised our community representative group.

At the Community Representative Group meeting, we reviewed the findings from community representative interviews and community meetings, and based on issues identified, we developed evaluation criteria for the proposed solutions.

Strategy 6. Conduct Public Open House Meetings

It is critical to community support to return to the people who will be the users of potential new transportation services. They want to know what happened to their ideas – how they were evaluated, why some of them may have been ruled out, what the costs are, how they might be involved in making sure that the proposed solutions move forward. In this way, they can move from merely contributors to the process at the outset to participants who understand and help determine the end results.

Two public open house meetings were conducted: one in the Cherryland/Ashland area and one in South Hayward. The open house meetings were designed to serve several purposes:

- To present proposed community-based solutions for closing transportation gaps.
- To show the communities how their work was incorporated into the study, and provide the opportunity for additional comments or reactions.
- To serve as a critical component of the evaluation process.
- To manage the expectations of community members (“there are no guaranteed or immediate results”).

In preparation for the public open houses, the consulting team summarized key study findings and issues. The information was prepared in a comprehensive, easy-to-understand format. The informal format of the meetings allowed individuals to assess their own areas of

interest and to speak one-on-one with other community members, project facilitators and representatives of local agencies.

Although the open houses provided an opportunity for the public and media to learn more about study issues and alternatives, they also provided a forum for soliciting comments as part of the evaluation process and an opportunity for questions and answers. Meetings were publicized in letters to community representatives, a newsletter, public notices, and through press releases.

Strategy 7. Ongoing Public Information

In addition to the strategies discussed above, other tasks were identified to inform the community about the study.

Informational Press Releases

The consulting team prepared a press release to announce the community open houses. The information was also provided to community representatives to share information with local newspapers and community newsletters, as well as ACCMA, MTC, BART, and AC Transit. The information was also mailed to media representatives.

Project Newsletter

In conjunction with the community Open House, a project newsletter was prepared. ACCMA mailed the newsletter to persons on the project mailing list and also distributed it to community representatives via the Internet. The one-page single color newsletter highlighted study findings and announced the public open houses and the role of the public in the review and decision-making process.

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The various meetings and activities described above allowed for a successful involvement process. Figure 4-2 provides a summary of the outreach meetings (excluding the individual community representative interviews).

**Figure 4-2 Summary of Community Meetings, Activities and Events
(Excluding Community Representative Interviews)**

Neighborhood	Meeting/Event/Effort	Date
All	FESCO: The Family Shelter	9/15/2003
All	Community Representatives Meeting	11/18/2003
Ashland	Ashland Community Center Member mailings	9/2003
Ashland	SAFE Ashland Steering Committee	9/25/2003
Ashland	Ashland Community Center ESL and other classes	10/2003
Ashland	Ashland Senior Tuesday	10/14/2003
Ashland	Hispanos de Ashland; Ashland Health Collaborative	11/3/2003
Ashland and Cherryland	Community Open House	2/23/2004
Cherryland	Clean-up Day (Supervisor Miley)	9/20/2003
Cherryland	Cherryland Barbeque	9/21/2003
Cherryland	Banyan House I	9/22/2003
Cherryland	Sunset Adult School surveys and meetings	10/2003
Cherryland	Cherryland Elementary School PTA	10/9/2003
Cherryland	Cherryland CAC	10/14/2003
Cherryland	Banyan House II	10/20/2003
South Hayward	South Hayward Collaborative	8/21/2003
South Hayward	St. Rose Health Fair	9/2003
South Hayward	South Hayward Neighborhood Collaborative Coordinators Meeting	9/9/2003
South Hayward	South Hayward Community Outreach Partnership Center	9/11/2003
South Hayward	Hijos del Sol Youth Leadership	10/8/2003
South Hayward	Hayward Collaborative on Youth	10/16/2003
South Hayward	Tyrell Street Clean-up	10/25/2003
South Hayward	Community Healing Network	11/4/2003
South Hayward	Community Open House	2/24/2004

Key Issues and Highlights

The public involvement process uncovered a vast array of transportation issues and potential strategies to address them. The key issues raised are as follows:

- **Transit is unable to effectively meet all community transportation needs.** In Ashland, Cherryland and South Hayward, transit service is a critical component of the local lifeline transportation network. Nevertheless, with limited resources, a vast geographic region, and a multitude of trip purposes ranging from afternoon local school trips in the project area to swing-shift regional commutes, the public transit network — AC Transit and BART — are not designed to meet all community needs. Limited frequencies require careful trip planning and can mean leaving the house an hour earlier than would be necessary if traveling by private car. Jobs starting at early morning hours or classes ending late in the evening are difficult or impossible for persons without other transportation alternatives. Unsafe boarding locations or long walks to access AC Transit buses make the service inconvenient for certain types of trips and for many of the people who rely on it.

Some of the individuals who participated in the community outreach process expressed concern about coming up with community-based transportation solutions, suggesting that AC Transit and existing providers deserve any and all of the potential resources that might be available for transportation. According to the community, however, making public transportation work will mean making it more accessible, flexible, and finding other modes when public transit cannot best meet the demand.

- **Paratransit is perceived as unreliable and only available to a limited population (those served by the ADA mandate).** Individuals who are familiar with East Bay Paratransit describe the problems that customers report: drivers who are not courteous and do not provide assistance, vehicles that arrive too early or late, difficulty scheduling trips, a limited service area, etc. In South Hayward, which is also served by the City of Hayward's own paratransit program, riders are limited to 10 vouchers per month. Only seniors and persons with disabilities are eligible to use paratransit services at all, although some community representatives suggested making it available to children and single parents.

According to paratransit users, restrictions and service issues compromise the reliability and perceived flexibility that paratransit can provide to eligible riders. Supplementing paratransit services with other programs, as well as educating consumers and agency representatives about realistic expectations of paratransit is a possible consideration as part of this community-based plan.

- **Transportation is costly.** Although it is expensive to drive a car, it can also be expensive to use public transit. Automobile expenses include insurance, maintenance, gasoline, and registration, as well as the cost of the car itself. For an individual or family living on a very limited income, any one of these expenses can make travel prohibitive (owning a car or paying transit fare). Often families with lower incomes have older cars with more maintenance problems. This can increase

the cost of operating the car or even simply keeping the car in compliance with air quality standards.

Community representatives observed that, for a CalWORKS participant who lives in Ashland, Cherryland, or South Hayward and has a minimum wage job in San Francisco, round trip travel by AC Transit and BART can absorb nearly one-quarter of the daily wage. Even local travel around South Hayward on AC Transit, for example, can be costly on a fixed income, with riders paying \$1.50 per person for each one-way trip. Based on community input, strategies for reducing the cost of transportation will likely be an important component of an effective community-based plan.

- **Information about transit and transportation programs is limited or not accessible.** Many Bay Area transit providers pride themselves on the quality and availability of information about public transportation in the region. From the region-wide 5-1-1 telephone system to transit information web sites, some of the study area's residents and employees are familiar with transit information resources. However, with transit routes changing periodically, schedules being adjusted, and information readily available in only two or three of the fifty languages spoken in the study area, many people do not have the information they need to ride public transit. Some new immigrants are unaccustomed to the limited frequencies, transfer policies, or bus stops. Persons eligible for paratransit know neither of its availability nor its restrictions. Comprehensive and accessible information will be a necessary component of a transportation plan for the community.
- **Many areas lack sidewalks, bicycle lanes, crosswalks and other pedestrian amenities.** Pedestrian circulation is an issue raised by a number of community representatives. Many sidewalks are difficult to use or simply do not exist and therefore people feel unsafe walking in the neighborhood, riding their bicycle or crossing the street. Cherryland and Ashland (unincorporated Alameda County) lack some of the elements necessary for safe pedestrian circulation and convenient walking access in the community. The result is that many people are not only unable to walk, but also unable to access transit services because buses do not stop where there are no sidewalks due to their inability to provide ADA access in these locations. Thus, current sidewalk limitations represent a significantly weak link in the overall transportation network.
- **People feel "unsafe" walking or using public transportation.** In addition to limited sidewalks, and pedestrian amenities, some areas feel unsafe for any number of reasons. Not only do people feel unsafe waiting for a bus at a poorly lit street corner or under a vandalized bus shelter, but speeding traffic, dark underpasses and busy intersections — as well as knowledge of local gangs — create an uncertain atmosphere for some transit users and pedestrians. Using BART late at night or getting off an AC Transit bus in the evening can be very uncomfortable when these safety concerns are considered.

- **The design of the community affects the way people travel and where they go.** Supermarkets are not centrally located. Medical services are far away and not near transit routes for Cherryland and Ashland residents. Walking from the South Hayward BART Station to homes and businesses nearby means walking along busy streets without dense development. In some areas, residents live far from the services they use, and in others, where very high density suggests transit service would be successful, the lack of sidewalks does not allow for the bus to stop. New retail and housing developments are not necessarily built with transit in mind even though the built environment impacts the transportation choices people make. Although the Community-Based Transportation Plan's role is not to develop land-use and redevelopment policies for Central Alameda County, the goals and strategies identified in the process can inform planners and developers so they can better address community transportation priorities as new projects are proposed and constructed.
- Based on the public input process and the issues identified in the series of meetings and interviews conducted for this plan, numerous solutions have the potential for success in the community. Community members and agency representatives identified dozens of options, ranging from potentially costly solutions to simple programs that could be implemented easily and inexpensively. A more complete review and analysis of these and other preliminary solutions is presented in subsequent chapters. Among the programs most often suggested are the following:

Improve Transit Service - Many people would be satisfied with improvements to the services provided by AC Transit. According to community members, better frequencies (15 or 30 minutes versus 30 or 60 minutes, respectively), a longer service span beyond 8:00 or 10:00 PM on some routes, clean and safe bus stops, courteous drivers, lower fares and better transit information are needed. Some community members also recommended East Bay Paratransit improvements.

Sidewalk and Pedestrian Improvements - In portions of the study area, particularly Cherryland, sidewalk and pedestrian improvements were identified as some of the most critical needs. Although the Redevelopment Agency is addressing these issues along some streets, funding has not yet been identified for other desired improvements. According to community representatives, safe crossings, landscaping, traffic calming, and wide sidewalks would significantly enhance not only pedestrian movement in the community, but would also provide safe access to and waiting areas for transit services. Sidewalks would make it possible for transit to serve some unserved areas.

Improved Information - Options suggested include transit information at the bus stops, a local transportation information center, cable television information about transit, more accessible telephone information, a better program of bus signs and shelters for AC Transit, transit education programs in the schools, and brochures in multiple languages.

Transit Cost Savings - Subsidizing transit passes for single parents, students, senior citizens and persons with very limited incomes would be one strategy for making travel affordable. Low-income riders are seriously limited by transit costs. Seamless no-cost or reduced-cost transfers between AC Transit and BART would also improve mobility options. Replacing programs that were eliminated such as BART Plus would be an option.

Bicycle Solutions - Some community members noted that if better bicycle facilities, bicycle parking and safe bike lanes could be found in the area, bicycles would be an inexpensive and effective way to travel in the community. It was noted by an agency representative who works with immigrants, that many new residents are accustomed to using bicycles for their travel needs, but that the physical environment (e.g., few bicycle lanes, narrow roads, services and residences located throughout a large area) does not foster the use of bicycles.

Shuttles - The community likes the idea of a shuttle because the expectation is that a shuttle provides somewhat personalized local service that is clean, friendly and safe. A shuttle is visualized as a smaller vehicle that can “go more places” than a large AC Transit bus. Establishing shuttles could involve churches and social service agencies using existing vans and buses, or working with employers or private industry to establish special shuttle routes.

Automobile Solutions - Subsidizing automobile repairs and car rentals, as well as car sharing are possible solutions for people who cannot rely on transit for the types of trips they take. In addition, a driver reimbursement program, whereby volunteer drivers would be reimbursed for taking people to their destination, was suggested for some types of trips.

TDM (Transportation Demand Management)-Supportive Programs - Introducing or promoting a “Guaranteed Ride Home Program,” a subsidized taxi program, or community-organized vanpools would increase the transportation options in Central Alameda County.

Chapter 5 provides a comprehensive review of the issues raised by community members in the activities described in this chapter. Several appendices are included to present to the specific comments and concerns raised by community members and agency representatives, as well as survey respondents.